

NEW JERSEY



1999-2000

Guidelines and
Application

BEST

ORIGINAL

PRACTICES

Deadline for Application to County Office:
NOVEMBER 22, 1999

| | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------|
| Category | Early Childhood | (Application is limited to one category. See page 3 for details.) | |
| Practice Name | Primary School Environmental Theme | | |
| Number of Schools with Practice | 1 | (If more than one school or district, read and complete information on page 2.) | |
| County | Bergen | | |
| District (Proper Name) | Midland Park Public Schools | | School District |
| District Address | street/p. o. box 31 Highland Avenue city Midland Park, NJ 07432 zip code | | |
| District Telephone | (201)444-1400 Fax (201)444-3051 Email | | |
| Chief School Administrator | Frederick M. Triano, Jr. | | |
| Nominated School #1 (Proper Name) | | | |
| School Address | Godwin School street/p. o. box 41 E. Center Street city Midland Park, NJ 07432 zip code | | |
| School Telephone | (201)445-5351 Fax (201)444-3051 Email | | |
| School Principal | Alexis M. Eckert, Assistant Principal | | |
| Program Developer(s) | The Godwin School K-2 Staff | | |
| Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature | <i>Frederick M. Triano, Jr.</i> | | |

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ☒ Yes ☐ No County Superintendent's Signature*John R. Graham*

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**NEW JERSEY
BEST PRACTICES
1999-2000 APPLICATION**

Application Requirements:

- ◆ **RESPONSES to the information and the statements below must be ANONYMOUS.** No reference should be made to the names of the district or the school(s). Use the words "the school" or "the schools" in referring to the applicant in responding to the statements.
- ◆ **USE ONLY THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE APPLICATION FORM on pages 1, 2 (if applicable) and 4 and THE NUMBER OF LINES SPECIFIED FOR RESPONSES to the statements.** Do not include any additional materials, as they will not be reviewed in the selection process.
- ◆ Application must be **keyboarded on 8 1/2" x 11" white paper, portrait format. Ten-point or larger computer font or twelve-pitch or larger typewriter font must be used.** (This sentence is in ten-point.)
- ◆ **KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to the statements below must be **no more than a total of three pages.** Keyboard the statement followed by the response. Format your response to the number of lines specified.
- ◆ The information on page 4 and the keyboarded responses to statements must be printed or copied on one side of the page. The information on pages 1 and 2 (if applicable) must be printed or copied on one side of the page. Staple pages 1 and 2 (if applicable) and 4 and the keyboarded responses together.
- ◆ The original application must be signed by the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person, indicating his/her approval.
- ◆ The original and seven copies of the application must be submitted to the county superintendent of schools by November 22, 1999, with the Itemized List of District Applications form. Keep the seven copies of each application together with the original containing the signature of the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person on the top of each set.
- ◆ **FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE PROCEDURES FOR SUBMISSION OF THE APPLICATION MAY RESULT IN THE ELIMINATION OF THE APPLICATION.**

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application: | | |
| Type of School <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary School <input type="checkbox"/> Middle School <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Grade Levels K-2 _____ _____ _____ | Practice Name <u>Primary School</u> <u>Environmental Theme</u> Number of Schools with Practice <u>1</u> Number of Districts with Practice <u>1</u> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Check the ONE CATEGORY into which the practice best fits. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts (Visual and Performing Arts) <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment/Evaluation <input type="checkbox"/> Bilingual Education and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship/Character Education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Support/Guidance and Counseling Programs (services contributing to high student achievement) | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Physical Education <input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts Literacy <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development <input type="checkbox"/> Public Engagement (family involvement and partnerships with business, community and/or higher education) | <input type="checkbox"/> Safe Learning Environment <input type="checkbox"/> School-to-Careers/Workplace Readiness <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education <input type="checkbox"/> World Languages |

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated. **(Maximum of 50 lines for response)**
2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards** addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s). **(Maximum of 50 lines for response)**
3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. **(Maximum of 60 lines for response)**

*The 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.
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I. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement, and how it can be replicated.

Have you ever wished that you could visit the magic of the Rainforest? Or dive beneath the mystery of the Ocean depths? Children in our school have seen both while never leaving the hallways of their school. Each year our school is amazingly transformed from a Primary Unit of Learning into an engaging new ecosystem. Our students, teachers and community members become inhabitants of a new world. Through an annual school-wide environmental theme, we have given the gift of environmental awareness to the children and community of our town.

The objectives of the project are many and differ according to grade level. Some of the most significant and all encompassing objectives are as follows:

- To provide students with an environmental consciousness that stretches beyond their own front doors.
- To elevate the idea of students as researchers through various research projects.
- To educate the community of the various ecosystems and their inhabitants and characteristics.
- To empower students, together with the community to become energized by learning.

Each year staff members generate a list of themes developed by the children and parents of the school. The theme is then discussed, voted upon, and enacted. Thus far we have visited the Rainforest of South America; the Ocean's Depths and a Land of Animals A-Z. Using the three-tiered layout of the building, each grade level focuses on a different layer of that year's ecosystem. It is then that grade level's responsibility to learn about and then convert their portion of the building into that layer. For example the Rainforest's forest floor, understory, canopy and emergent layer were depicted on the various levels during last year's theme. Students create all work displayed including - life-sized animal reproductions and descriptions, collaborative dioramas, research papers, fact books, multimedia presentations, art projects and environmental props. The realism exhibited isn't limited to visual stimulation, but also auditory and kinesthetic. One can hear Rainforest animals throughout the halls and sample Rainforest products all through the building. The atmosphere of the school enhances the motivation of the students and propels learning forward with an energy unlike any other. The children see themselves as researchers and scientists.

The culmination of the unit is our Annual Open House where parents, grandparents, community and Board of Education members, children and adults celebrate the learning that has taken place over the month. Even Television's Storm Field has visited our Rainforest to forecast the weather from there. Children lead their invited guests around the school being careful not to be carried off by a leaf cutting ant or swished away by a Killer Whale. They proudly guide their safari members toward their multimedia slide shows, which may show a depiction of what Rainforest animal they would like to be, or an Ocean of Dictionary terms.

Children and teachers embark upon the topic of study by brainstorming activities and ideas from an extensive variety of sources including books, journals, aquariums, zoos, the Internet and the children themselves. Activities and assignments are determined within the individual grade levels and can expand across grade levels without fear of repetition since the theme changes each year. Each grade level completes a research report that can take the form of a recycled animal creation on the kindergarten level, a genuine research report on the first grade level or an animal diorama on the second grade level. All grade levels participate in raising funds to adopt an acre of the Rainforest or an Ocean Animal by selling and wearing a theme related T-shirt.

II. Describe the educational needs of the students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standards.

In addition to the age differences amongst the children in a Primary Unit, we also have a melange of different learners involved. Children with different learning styles including, children with hearing impairments, autistic children, children with learning disabilities, and gifted children are mainstreamed throughout the school. In order to reach the needs of all of these children, the entire staff of the school was on hand to plan, brainstorm and implement the unit. Teachers of the Deaf aided in language disparities noted while undertaking research activities. Teachers of the Handicapped modified and augmented activities to meet the needs of their students. Parents, teachers and support staff such as Interpreters, Educational Aides and Speech Therapists aided in reducing the adult to student ratio while completing writing and artistic assignments. In appropriate classes, children used sign language skills to communicate with their Deaf Peers while peer editing research papers. All activities were altered as necessary to ensure the success of all of the children. Themes of study begin with a Language Experience Assessment of what the children already know and what they expect to learn. During the assessment phase, the children have the opportunity to see if their own objectives have been met.

Science Content Standard 5.6 focuses on the students understanding of the structure, characteristics and basic needs of organisms. Large portions of time are spent dealing with the ability of the children to name and explain the various characteristics of different classifications of animals. For instance, each classroom contained a bulletin board depicting the various types of animals and their classification. Students were also taught the needs and characteristics of the different life forms including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. First Grade students raised frogs from eggs to adult frogs and observed the metamorphosis of their life cycle.

Content Standard 5.7 states that all students will investigate the diversity of life. In no other way could students have been better exposed to this content standard then in creating, writing about, and researching the different life forms found in each layer of the ecosystem being studied. Kindergarten children created and learned about Giant Squid that can be found on the bottom level of the ocean yet have never been seen alive. Students investigated the most recent life forms discovered through information found on the Internet. Some students were able to question scientists, through *NASA's Live from the Rainforest* project, for the answers to specific questions. Guest speakers brought a wide variety of animals native to the Rainforest to the school for children to see, touch, and hear. The children were able to ask questions of the experts and experience life forms in an authentic way.

All students will develop an understanding of the environment as a system of interdependent components affected by human activity and natural phenomena states Standard 5.12. Children achieved this by observing plants inside a handmade soda-bottle terrarium as they gained strength from the sun, air and water. Some children depicted the life cycles found in an ecosystem in the form of a student generated bulletin board display. Children learned of the loss of life suffered through the destruction of Rainforest or the pollution of the World's Oceans, as they collected money to save acres of the rainforest or adopt a manatee. Even news clips were used to display the recent devastation sustained in the Rainforest because of fires, which were accidentally created by the natives while trying to clear their land for farming. Students used the technique of persuasion while writing meaningful messages regarding Rainforest deforestation on grocery bags to be distributed through the local stores. The children were proud to educate the community in this way. In addition, the students were assessed on their ability to write a letter to a government official using appropriate style and writing conventions.

Cross- Content Workplace Readiness Standard 2 states that all children will use information, technology, and other tools. Through the creation of multimedia slide presentations using Kid Pix, children used the computer to produce a product that they would share with the community as well as their peers. In addition, the children used programs such as, Animal Planet and Wide World of Animals to search for information about a specific animal while completing his/her research report. Readiness Standard 3 assures that each student will use critical thinking skills, decision making, and problem solving skills. In the research phase of the project, the students must gain information from a variety of sources including print and non -print materials from the library media center; as well as, from books and software found in the classroom and at home.

III. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

It is difficult to put into words the amount of learning that is undertaken in a project of this size. The assessment is ongoing and seamless. Teachers assess the children's learning on a daily basis through evaluation and anecdotal records. The energy that is felt in the building on the night of the unveiling is unable to be assessed using paper and pencil means. As one watches the children lead the community and family members through a world that they have created, one that is their own, the knowledge that they have gained is evident. Nothing is more authentic than the ability of the children to act as Rainforest Safari guides. Throughout the learning process, the children truly become active and involved citizens of their community and greater world.

On a more tangible and practical note the children's writing is assessed through a 14 point teacher developed RUBRIC that looks for amount of detail, conventions of grammar and spelling and organization of thought. The first and second grade children are video taped while reciting their oral reports. After completing the report the floor is opened up to questions at which time the child defends his/her information. And defend it they do! As noted earlier, the children complete a Language Experience Chart by compiling a list of what learning has taken place to see that it meets or exceeds their expectations. Grade level objectives will vary according to the activities chosen and are assessed in a more formal way according to teacher generated evaluations on each grade level.